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30 July 1985PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE ASSAILED FOR DRINKING, BEHAVIOR
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STAT

Despite a record of drunken driving and criticism for abusive behavior as a congressional aide, President Reagan's nominee for a top energy post appears headed for a quick confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

After a hearing Monday into Charles A. Trabandt's public and private life over the past 20 years, none of the 18 members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee were willing to outrightly oppose his appointment to a \$72,300-a-year seat on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

"You're highly competent and very bright," Sen. J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, the committee's ranking Democrat, told Trabandt on Monday. "Unfortunately, you are, on occasion, what appears to be a mean drunk."

The committee's chairman, Sen. James McClure, R-Idaho, and one of Trabandt's former bosses, said he hopes both the committee and the full 100-member Senate will vote in the next four days on the nomination.

At age 43, Trabandt appears to hold the credentials qualifying him for high government office. And last month he was nominated by Reagan for one of two vacant seats on the commission, which regulates the electrical and natural gas industries.

A graduate of the Naval Academy at Annapolis, he was a nuclear submarine officer for six years. He served four years in the CIA. Over a decade, he rose from a junior House committee aide on energy issues to the job of chief counsel for the Senate committee that must approve his nomination.

But another side of "Chuck" Trabandt was exposed during the confirmation hearing. That other side concerned his dealings with senators, House members and their aides as much as it did with his run-ins with the police.

"I've found difficulty at times in his ... devious and abrasive style," said Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore. "At times I was actually offended by his style of operation."

But Hatfield likened Trabandt to an Army buddy "you might not want to socialize with at the officer's club but who you would want by your side in the trenches during battle."

"The pluses outweigh the minuses in the case of Chuck Trabandt," Hatfield said. "I'll opt for competence and intelligence over style."

Cast in the role of a returning prodigal son, Trabandt answered the questions of the senators, most of whom addressed him by his first name, about a confidential FBI report on his background accompanying the nomination.

"I've had embarrassing incidents connected with drinking and driving," said Sen. John Melcher, D-Mont., calling the White House's handling of the nomination and the FBI report a "disservice" to Trabandt.

"Of President Reagan's appointees, if graded on a scale of one to 10, this one would grade pretty high on that scale," Melcher said. "The next person he appoints is likely not to know anything about energy or FERC."

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McClure, in a deal with Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, conducted most of the questioning Monday, saying it was "necessary in the collective judgment of the committee" because of the "speculation and innuendo" about Trabandt's FBI report.

Trabandt acknowledged he was arrested by Virginia State Police for drunken driving in 1975 while he was a Republican aide to the House Science and Technology Committee. Ultimately he pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of reckless driving and paid a fine.

Six years later, after he had become the Senate committee's chief counsel, Trabandt acknowledged getting into fight while "drinking heavily" at a staff party at a bar near the Capitol.

"There was some shouting and some physical contact," he testified. "To the best of my knowledge, no blows were struck, though there may be been several swings exchanged by both parties."

Most troubling to the senators, however, was Trabandt's arrest by National Park Police in July 1981 on charges of drunken driving.

"I was quite intoxicated; I recall very little of the events while in custody of Park Police," he said. "The officer recalled that I was abusive and made threats."

In response to questions by McClure, Trabandt said he didn't recall telling the policeman: "I write your budget; you can't do this to me."

"If I did act in that manner, it is a matter of deep personal disgrace," he said. "Needless to say, this incident is a low point in my personal and professional life."

But he did acknowledge calling David Swanson, a White House congressional liaison, that night and Steve Shipley, who was then-Interior Secretary James Watt's executive assistant, the next morning seeking a speedy release from jail.

Trabandt assured McClure that his problems with drinking are in the past. But in response to a question Metzenbaum, he said, "I would not be honest if I did not say there have been a few occasions in the last couple of years where I drank to excess."

"If it (drinking) creates that kind of problem," Sen. Wendell Ford, D-Ky., told Trabandt, "you just ought to quit."